**What is Culture?**

***“Culture, schmulture! People are basically the same around the world and I don’t need to know any ‘culture stuff’ as an American. They can learn my culture, right?” Wrong!*** --from the book Cultural Intelligence… by Brooks Peterson

Dear Talbot:

Today we will explore the definition of “culture.” I will challenge your thoughts about culture and introduce you to a new way of thinking about it. Why is culture so important, you say? Before we take a look at what culture actually is, let’s see what YOU think it is! Read and complete this question before we meet together for a culture exercise. If you don’t know, do not write “I don’t know”--take a guess instead!

What is YOUR definition of “culture”? Write your definition below:

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An anthropologist is a scientist who specializes in study of the origin, the behavior, and the physical, social, and cultural development of humans. Here is one anthropologist’s definition of “culture”:

***“The sum total of ways of living, including behavioral norms, linguistic expression, styles of communication, patterns of thinking, and beliefs and values of a group large enough to be self sustaining, transmitted over the course of generations.”*** F. E. Jandt, 2001

**Now let’s explore what culture can look like in symbols.**

**(Tree) (OR) (iceberg)**

**Is Culture like a Tree or an Iceberg?**

Actually, culture can be like either one! Both analogies are accurate because there are aspects of culture that are very visible and aspects that are more difficult to perceive, almost hidden. Think of a tree: the trunk and the branches are obvious, but the roots of the tree are hidden from our view, under the ground. Although we can’t see them, we know they are there, because the visible tree can’t live without roots. Think of an iceberg: an iceberg does not float on top of the water, but there is much more beneath the surface; a mountain of ice. Only a small portion of the iceberg rises above the water where it is visible. The visible portion of the iceberg would not be there if it weren’t for the supportive ice below it.

Culture is like both the tree and the iceberg. There are certain aspects of culture that are apparent and easy to spot (you can see, touch, hear, taste them), but there are also aspects of culture that are much bigger and that run deep beneath the surface. These are the aspects of culture that are the most important for you to be aware of in your host country. These cultural differences can mean the difference between success and failure!

Now that you are aware of the two different types of culture, you will try two exercises one on your own and one with a partner.

Sincerely,

Moses Hampton

**Exercise A: The Cultural Tree’s Attributes (on your own)**

**Concept of Justice, Music, Architecture, Concept of Beauty, Attitude Towards Elderly, Celebrations, Language, Gender Roles, Food, Humor, and Gestures**

Look at **The Culture Tree** in your packet. Take the following important attribute of culture in bold print above and write them either in the branches of the tree (differences that are experienced by the senses) or in the roots of the tree (not experienced by the senses). When finished, you will participate in a discussion about where and why you put each cultural attribute. Remember: do this exercise on your own, because you will have a chance to work together in a few moments!

**Exercise B: The United States Iceberg (with a partner)**

Now let’s try another exercise, this time with the Iceberg Analogy. You will be divided into small groups. With your group, look at the “Features of Culture” worksheet in your packet. Following the exercise, you will share answers with the class. Then, look at the “U.S. Iceberg” as a graphic organizer and put all ten answers either in the “obvious” portion of the iceberg ABOVE the water’s surface or in the “hidden” portion of the iceberg, below the water’s surface.

It’s time to brainstorm with a partner about what parts of American culture are obvious to all, and which parts are more difficult (hidden) for foreigners to understand.

Here’s an example of each: American’s participate in school sports (above the surface) and we value freedom (below the surface).